

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, October 25, 1877, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. 115 Jermyn St., London, Thursday Oct. 25, (1877) My dear Mrs. Bell:

I have not written to you before because I have dreaded telling you of our plans, and wanted Alec to do so. But he has gone off to Bradford now, and when he returns he will be occupied with the preparation of his lecture here, so I must write myself. Alec has decided to remain here until next summer. He says that in America there are plenty of trained men who know all about the telephone and its management, while here there is no one but himself. Then there are his patents in France, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Italy. All except the last one in the control of my father as my trustee, but of course when he is so far away and has so much to occupy him at home, he cannot manage the business so well as some one here could. Then some gentlemen here, headed by Latimer Clarke have agreed to organize a company with a capital of two hundred thousand pounds to control the patents here, and they say they must have Alec's services as electrician at least for the first year. So that altogether Alec thinks it best he should remain. He thinks he is more sure of a good income here than at home. I believe if the company is organized he will receive one thousand pounds salary. There is a young man now in London and Sweden, his full name Yens Sigfried Krogh Hopstock. He heard of Alec and the telephone, procured a pair of instruments, experimented with them and became so much interested in them that though only a poor civil engineer he applied for patents in Norway, Sweden and Denmark in Alec's name, and then set out to go to America to see Alec about it. It was by the merest accident that he heard we were here. Alec has agreed to complete the patents and to appoint Mr. Hopstock his general agent for all three countries. Last night a 2 young friend of mine with her husband came to dine with us. He is about twenty-two, and has some six or seven million of dollars, and he was so much fascinated with the telephone

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that he wanted to take out patents in every country not secured at his own expense, and in pure generosity and eagerness to be of use. Alec of course declined, though the young fellow made his offers in such a modest way he could not but be pleased, but he at least proposed to let Mr. Sears take out the Italian patents and either let Alec pay him back or take an interest. Alec thought he did it partly to please his pretty young bride, though why she should be pleased I do not know. Who do you suppose took dinner with us on the 25th, Mr. McBurney and his wife — nee Marie Eggleston. They were married last February and sailed today from Plymouth for Australia. Alec says Mrs. McBurney looks if anything younger and less stout than when he last saw her. As for Mr. McBurney he is a little man with a brown beard and ghastly white face. He seemed to me far gone in consumption, but as Alec says if he has held out so long he may hold out longer. He is much interested in Visible Speech and Alec explained it all to him.

A letter has just come from Sir William Thomson enclosing one to him from his brother Prof. James Thomson, L.L.D. and F.R.S. I send you an extract thinking you and Mr. Bell may be interested. "Max Miller has published the following. "The dialectic study of phonetics has larger objects." It wishes to exhaust all possible sounds which can be produced by the vocal organs, little concerned as to whether these sounds occur in any real language or not. It is particularly useful for the purposes of painting, with the utmost accuracy the actual pronunciation of individuals, and of fixing the faintest shades of dialectic variety. The most marvelous achievement in this branch of applied phonetics may be seen in Mr. Bell's Visible Speech," "further 3 on he says." "But when we want to exhaust all possible shades of sound, when we want to photograph the peculiarities of certain dialects, or measure the deviations in the pronunciation of individuals by the most minute degrees we then must avail ourselves of that exquisite artistic machinery constructed by Mr. Bell and handled with so much skill by Mr. A. J. Ellis, though few only will be able to use it with real success.' "I myself have learned Melville Bell's system far enough to lead me to admire it very much." The object of the letter is to induce Sir William to ask Alec to lecture before the Philological Society of Glasgow on Visible Speech. They want him to

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Speak at the opening meeting on the 7th. of Nov. I have just written to Sir William saying I was sure he would lecture, but that as he had to lecture in Glasgow on the telephone on the 8th, and in Greenock on the 9th., I thought it was rather too much, Sir William offered some other day. After deciding to remain here all winter the next thing was to find a place to stay in. These rooms are very expensive, and beside two are not enough. Then came the question how to get a suite of rooms in part of a house without the care of servants. Finally I proposed hunting up Mary Home and taking her for housekeeper. We found here, she consented and since then we have been to several houses and have applied for the refusal of one, No.10 Connaught Place, Hyde Park. It is for rent furnished at a merely nominal rent. The owner simply wants to keep the house open while he is away so he asks three guineas a week for six months, and he leaves one or two servants whose wages he pays. We went over it this morning, the house looks old and dingy, but on the whole rather artistic, and the only question now is whether there are bedrooms enough for Mamma and perhaps my sister. There are six I think, but four are on the fourth story where the servants are, and only one bedroom down stairs is big enough for two. It depends a great deal if Mamma comes now or next spring, if now she must have the big bedroom, if later the other is comfortable and will do for a short time. We shall also not take the house unless we can keep it for eight months.

But now I must tell you about poor Mary Home. After you and Mr. Bell left she got into difficulties about her house, first she fell into the hands of an auctioneer who sold off the furniture by auction and got the proceeds, and then sealed up the house so that it required the Hyde Park(?) gunpowder explosion which broke the windows to help her to get inside the house which gave her control over it again. The lawyer Mr. Pluker who had helped her in this let the house for her at eighty pounds a year, obtained the lease from her as security for the payment of his charges, and since then has refused to return it to her. He pays her three pounds a month, and keeps all the rest of the eighty pounds himself. He will not tell her how much his charges are. Alec is very indignant and wants to demand a statement of charges from the attorney and pay them so as to free her.

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The three pounds a month is all she has to live on and she is very badly off. Alec says he was shocked to see how old and feeble she seemed. Alec received a letter from you this morning, but he went off so early that I did not see it. He has also received several newspapers from you. Alec has seemed very well and bright since leaving Elgin, he has not once complained of the old pain in his right leg, and the skin trouble is almost entirely gone, so much so that he can wear flannel. He lectures before the Society of telegraphic Engineers here on the 31st. or is it the 1st. of Nov? and he means to make great preparations for it, and to write his lecture, I am in despair, that means sitting up all night, and terrific hurry at the end. Alec is lecturing in Bradford now; perhaps he will have to go on the Liverpool tomorrow, but I hope not. This is the first time he has been away from me and I find it very lovely all alone here 5 I am very tired, so please excuse this. Goodnight, with love to yourself and Mr. Bell and the Miss Symonds

Affectionately your daughter, Mabel.